One Year

A *Cheshire Cat* Short Story

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March 31st, 2025

You were, as occasionally people happen to be, still there. The room had shifted with time, gradually, and you may just not have noticed it. There were shades to the room, darker shades of turquoise and maroon. You hoped you were familiar with the room. After all, the two of you had history. If these things had been done correctly, of course. There was always the possibility you were new to the room. But even if you were, the room would have its history with you. This *is* a fact of life, like couch cushions or dragonflies. Or perhaps it was. The room, regardless of your nature, had recognized this history, and hoped you had caught up on it. To be simple, factual, and bordering upon the plain, the room had shifted with time.

And so had you.

"Close those blinds," the Cheshire Cat said, and the Venetian Blinds closed ever so slightly, dappling the room in staggered horizontal lines. It had been some time since the Cat had last spoken.

"Yes, it has been a year," the Cheshire Cat said, and it had been a year. These things had passed as years did, with trials, tribulations, rituals/traditions, and rites of passage. With films and comics and things on the television. Sports games and theater shows and new dresses. With love and candles and water trickling upon cobblestone, with families and friends and loneliness and words. It had been a year.

"I hope it has not been too hard on you," the Cheshire Cat said, and although it was a simple, if kind sentence, he was as erudite as ever. Cats were like that. Even if they were being silly, they were always erudite.

The fancy Russian rug upon which the Cat lay was not frayed in the slightest. Unlike everything else in the room, only one second had passed for the rug. It was a (slowly sharpened) mountain of pure diamond, if only you understood the nature of such things.

The sun had faded the couch slightly, because it had been directly in the window. Perhaps this was why the Cat asked you to close the blinds, but this assumes of course that you do your reading in the daytime and not at night. You know(s?) what they say about assumptions.

"How has the reading been?" the Cat asked. You couldn't possibly say. After all, these things are so variable. *You* has no idea what *You've* done, have they? But let's not invite overcomplication. It only leads to grammatical trouble.

You didn't say anything. Not yet.

There were as many books on the shelves as ever. There were still Stories of Archons and Abraytha and Everywhere, of Lotto and Lords and Luca, of SAM and Shamblers and *Zadellin*, but now there were more tomes. There were stories of Avenue, of June, Wick, and the colour red dripping into the tiniest crack. A tall dark spire illuminated Yahed's world and around the corner rested the rubble of the Interdimensional Scrapyard, Rhyz'ir, Nzhi'ax, and so many other things…

But the shelves were empty. They may have smelled of Ballet Shoes and Honeysuckle, but still. They'd hardly been touched. You felt so odd. There were so many books. So many. You weren't overwhelmed, but there were many feelings in your chest. From every reader, maybe — but what did *that* mean? Maybe your head was hurting.

"It's okay if you haven't read them all," the Cat said. "There is time, and you've been busy. So have I."

Over by the counter — there was a counter — stood a small tabletop. On the tabletop, there was a dark bottle of ink, not too large but not too small. You couldn't notice that the ink was there until you'd read the line on the page, but you *were* there, weren't you? So why couldn't you notice it? Why couldn't you see the tabletop in your mind's eye?

The Cat wasn't smiling. This was odd. This was wrong. Your chest might have ached, or pounded, and it might have been your heart racing. The Cat was talking, though, and Time is a funny thing, so listen up:

"We may have last met in so many places. We may have last met here. We may have last met in Codexes. We may have last met on a park bench in the coldest Winter, in Wonderland, or it may have been Easter too. It can be difficult. You can talk to me. I know it seems like you can't. That You isn't really here, that you're words on the page, that this is all in the past, and a fictional past at that. But I'm always listening, if you need me."

Such a personal little thing, that Cat. He was — he *is* smiling again now, now that you are looking at him. The glorious little grin that stretches so wide that you think it's forced. But it isn't. The Cat, deep down, isn't Garfield. He's a very happy cat, and it might not be relatable of him, but even now and then he can enjoy a Monday.

What does the Cat sound like to You? The voice is familiar, cloying. You can just recognise it, hear it off the page, only just barely. These things are matters of

perspective. Maybe he sounds like a famous actor. It would be nice if he sounded like someone you know, but if it's suggested in the words, then it becomes a fact, then it isn't a matter of interpretation. The Cat doesn't like facts.

If you walk over to the shelf — yes, that one — and pick up that book there, you can find a classic example of Cat behavior. The book is called *One Year*. It's a thin, thin, book. Perhaps it qualifies as more of a pamphlet, at best. On the back cover, it has a short description that doesn't actually exist. If you open the book, there is another book in it, called *One Year*, and You're in it. This is recursion. This is recursion.

You decide not to walk over to that shelf. Better let these things rest. It's a good decision to make, after all, indecision. Very efficient. It actually makes you a decision because you aren't really making choices. You've decided to stand there and think about the choices rather than doing them.

There's this central indecision to the whole thing. It's like one of those video-games. They're marketed as GO ANYWHERE! DO ANYTHING! THE WORLD IS YOUR OYSTER. And You buy them for 70.00 and you immediately go to a very specific spot on the map and do that one thing that the game wants.

No, wait, don't buy them, You! Wait for a sale!

The Cat still isn't smiling, and this is starting to become far more disconcerting than any of those famed Cheshire-Cat grins possibly could manage. This year has been tough for it too, maybe. Has it been working hard?

"We're talkative today, aren't we?" the Cheshire Cat jokes with its Cheshire Cat voice — and the beginnings of a grin on its face slightly curl.

"We haven't said anything," You say.

"Out loud," the Cat notes, amusedly. But it's a sad amusement. Which is odd. It's rare to hear solemn meta-humour. "I hope you have been well, you know. I hope that all your sunrises are as you want them, and if they are not, then that I can be a small comfort. I hope, mainly."

If You need(s) comfort, the shelves await. They're small and meagre, but they slowly fill from time to time. New volumes. Tales of impossibility and heart and hope. Tales of that one time that Christmas came.

The books are not always red. The books are not always *read*. But that's only because there's so many on the shelves. Every now and then you just have to skip

Very Dull Book #347 by Anthony P. Jellyfish. It's like a 2/10. There's better stuff out there.

"Don't let me keep you," the Cheshire Cat says.

You walk over to the Cat. He rolls over slightly on his little rug to show you his fat tummy. He needs tummy rubs. The Cheshire Cat doesn't like facts, but there are some he will accept.

Pet the Cat and go to those shelves.

Take a look, it's in a book. But only if you need it.